

CHILDHOOD VULNERABILITIES

in South Africa

Some Ethical Perspectives



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CHAPTER 8

CHILDREN AND RACISM

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CHILDHOOD VULNERABILITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: SOME ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

This chapter commences with defining and highlighting racism as a term and a concept; defining its nature and how it is related to identity formation, as an ethical issue with moral imperatives. Then it will give a very brief historical background of the institutionalisation of racism as apartheid in the South African educational system, followed by a discussion of racial consciousness in children by drawing on the wider global context, specifically analysing very briefly, the significance of the so-called Clark doll experiment in the USA. It then proceeds to argue that racism is a social construct determined by contextual factors, arguing that racial diversity, contrary to racism, is a ‘natural’ phenomenon.

From this perspective, the author then discusses responses to efforts of racial integration in schools in post-1994 South Africa. In this context, it is further argued that schools constitute critical spaces where racist attitudes and practices are formed and inculcated. Then the chapter highlights the role of literature and media in informing racist tendencies in children. Finally, it accentuates the critical role that parents, and adults play in the socialisation of children’s racial attitudes.

WHAT IS RACISM?

Pachter et al. (2010:61) defined racism as “negative beliefs, attitudes, actions, or behaviours that are based on phenotypic characteristics or ethnic affiliations.” In their view, “[racism] assumes an inherent superiority on the basis of perceived group attributes” (:61). In other words, perceptions of group identities engender racist attitudes. In this respect, racism can be understood as being socially constructed. It is inherent in societal norms, traditions and attitudes. In some communities, over years, wrong beliefs and attitudes have been projected to appear as ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’. In communities where racism is acceptable, it finds legitimisation as a way of life. Pachter et al. posits that

[r]acism is often conceptualised as including beliefs and attitudes (racial prejudice) and actions and practices. It can occur on individual, internal or structural (institutional) levels, and it can either be subtle or obvious ... (p. 61)

In other words, racism is holistic; it entangles one's whole personality and character. On the other hand, Davis and Gandy (1999:368) denoted that, "racial identity may be understood as an ideological position." Ideologically defined, it is "patterns of ideas, belief systems, or interpretive schemes found in a society or found amongst specific social groups" (:368). Historically in South Africa, apartheid as a race-driven ideology has defined the destinies of races and ethnicities. Racial behaviour is considered to be a determinant of social behaviour. It influences "the individual choices" we make in society (:368). Multiple factors in context and operating on different levels of our existence define our racial identity and consciousness (:369).

Qureshi et al. (2008), argue that racism is an ethical issue related to mental and psychological problems. They assert that an increasing number of research "studies link the experience of racism to a variety of health and mental problems, with stress as the most direct link" (:S4). They further assert that the understanding of racism has shifted from viewing racism as overt "associated with white supremacy to unintentional or 'aversive' racism" (:S4). In other words, according to Qureshi et al., racism is more subtle. They conclude stating that, "[r]acism in mental health care is an ethical issue for psychiatrists and psychologists because it represents a very damaging force that is associated with mental health problems, and as such requires effective response" (:S4). The negative health effects of racism suggest that it is an unnatural social practice as it estranges a victim from his or her victimiser. Because of the adverse effect it has on relationships, racism is morally untenable and reprehensible precisely because it threatens to build healthy relationships in society.

Racial identity operates on many levels and in complex layers of existence. It entails group consciousness (Davis & Gandy 1999:374), goes beyond the colour of one's skin, defines one's intellect and

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“operates on a symbolic level” (Kelly 2018:23-24), and a material level. The inevitable critical question that arises is: Are we born racists? Kristen Russell (2017), citing Jason Marsh, answers that

[no], we aren’t necessarily born racist ... But we are born with a certain predisposition to fear that which we deem to be unlike us somehow. We are born with a predisposition to group people into categories. (n.p.)

Russell (2017:n.p.), citing Jason Marsh (2010:n.p.) continued stating that racism is about categorising people into racially different and inferior groups, where they are stereotyped and considered as the opposite to us. In short, racism is about an individual or group’s assertion of power and identity. However, it goes beyond group categorisation. It is also rooted in systems and structures, it is institutional. As Constantine (in Small-Glover et al. (2013:49) puts it succinctly, “[r]acism is an institutional pattern of power and social control that attempts to oppress people based on their ethnic or racial group membership.”

Jones (in Small-Glover et al. 2013:49.) categorised racism into three components: individual, institutional, and cultural. In Jones’ view, individual racism entails subjecting a person to discriminatory practices on account of their ethnic or racial “group and seeks to deprive them of access to opportunities” (:49). Fundamentally, it is about disempowering others by denying them access to resources, and by extension, power. Thus, this chapter will argue that children’s racism operates not only on a morphological level but entails symbolic order and consciousness as well.

INSTITUTIONALISATION OF RACISM IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

In South Africa, while the foundation of racism was laid long before, it was institutionalised from 1948 onwards. The *Bantu Education Act* of 1953, as it especially affected Black children in schools, laid a firm foundation of school racism as it continues to be experienced until today (Levy 2015:n.p.). The then Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd introduced *Bantu Education* to parliament, which was designed “to prepare African children for the lower echelons of the labour market” (:n.p.). Education in this new system would effectively be run by the Native Affairs Department (NAD) where Verwoerd (as minister) could more effectively control it.

Verwoerd’s attempts to sanitise the implementation of Bantu Education as beneficial for the “spiritual virtues of the Bantu’ community and his senseless rationale for Bantu Education could not change the perceptions of African parents that this was a measure for the intellectual enslavement of their children” (Levy 2015:n.p.). Facilities and support structures and systems were heavily skewed against Black children to favour White children, with under-qualified teachers. “Each African pupil received only 14% of the amount spent on a white pupil and just over half the sum spent on an Indian or Coloured student” (:n.p.).

Feldman (2018) noted that Bantu Education affected White children on psychological level and through propaganda. Using propaganda and operating on the level of mind-forming, young white children were socialised into believing that apartheid was not wrong. White children knew little or nothing at all about the life of Black people. In other words, in schools to some extent, the racist ideology of apartheid operated on the level of ideology. It made a subtle impression on the malleable minds of young white children.

RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN CHILDREN - CLARK'S DOLL EXPERIMENT IN THE USA

The question as to at what age children begin to acquire racist attitudes has exercised academic debate for a long time (Katz 1976:2). Katz (:2) noted that the “evidence available suggests that by three or four years of age many children make differential responses to skin colour and other racial cues.” While there seems to be a consensus that ethnic attitudes start developing early in the nursery school years, the question of children’s early preferences, however, still remain unresolved. Katz (:62) further stated that, “many theorists argue that the development of ethnic attitudes is tied to the processes of self-development in a child’s identity.” It is assumed that part of the self-discovery processes of children, entails learning which group they belong to or not. In other words, the development of self-consciousness in early child development is a critical phase in the forming of racial identity consciousness.

An experiment was performed in the 1940s by psychologists, Kenneth Bancroft Clark and his wife, Mamie Phipps Clark, to attempt to understand the indicators of racial bias in Black children (1947:169). Kenneth Clark experimented with Black children of ages from six to nine, with two dolls, one white and the other one, black. He posed questions to them such as, “Show me the doll that you like to play with ... show me the doll that’s a nice doll ... show me the doll that’s a bad doll” (:169). It was noted that, “[t]he black children who attended segregated schools had an even higher instance of choosing the black doll as bad and preferring the white doll to play with – over 70%” (:169). When Clark asked those boys and girls, “[n]ow show me the doll that’s most like you”, some became “emotionally upset at having to identify with the doll that they had rejected” (:169). Some even stormed out of the room. As Clark recalled, he and his wife concluded that “color in a racist society was a very disturbing and traumatic component of an individual’s sense of his own self-esteem and worth” (:169). The Clark’s experiment showed that Black

children experienced racial segregation as traumatic. It is clear from the experiment that the racial ordering in society made them to believe and understand that to be Black was inferior, and, therefore, being less than human. It estranged them; it undermined their dignity. American Society had socialised them to believe that Whites were superior to Blacks; that being Black was ugly. According to Oelofsen (2015:135), a similar study conducted in South Africa in 2011, showed that in spite of efforts to bridge racial gaps, “South African children still show[ed] sensitivity to ‘race’.” Oelofsen (2015) states that,

[s]imilar studies conducted in other parts of the world seemed to confirm the perception that white children show[ed] a high own-race preference, which is not present in black or mixed ‘race’ children. (p.135)

Oelofsen (2015:135) asserted that, “the symbolic order in which white is seen as good and pure, while black is seen as the opposite, namely evil and tainted, is one which still permeates the global discourse.” Global order fosters perceptions that define whiteness as ‘right’ and ‘might’ and blackness as its opposite. Oelofsen (2015:135) went on to conclude that, “[t]hese stereotypes, [are] ... embedded deep within many of our collective psyches”. In other words, for Oelofsen, racism is a global challenge that is driven by more or less established perceptions and attitudes of White people’s racial superiority over Black people that operate along binary and symbolic language, stereotyping racial superiority versus inferiority. From this perspective, we can conclude that racism exists to undermine the dignity of Black people.

RACISM AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

Wipfler (2019:n.p.) argued that “[c]hildren are not, by nature, racist. Nor are they born with damaging assumptions about people in any definable group.” They are socially conditioned to be racially biased.

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Hewitt (2018) noted that racial-ethnic socialisation entails four components: “(1) instilling cultural pride; (2) preparation for bias; (3) promotion of mistrust; and (4) egalitarianism.” In her view “[t]he goal of racial socialization is to provide children with a healthy sense of themselves while giving them tools to actively cope with varying forms of oppression” (Hewitt 2018). She further opined that

[b]lack children and adolescents who learn that others may have negative attitudes towards them but who have these messages mediated by parents, peers, and other important adults are less likely to have negative outcomes and more likely to be resilient in adverse conditions.

Racism is contrary to the natural ordering of society where diversity is normative. As Claire McCarthy (2019) verbalised it:

Biologically we are truly just one race, sharing 99.9% of our genes no matter what the color of our skin or what part of the world we come from. But historically we have found ways to not just identify differences, but to oppress people because of them. (p. 1)

McCarthy (2019:1) further expressed that “irrespective of the fact that biologically we are the same as humans, nonetheless, people still perceive differences, they assume racial superiority, racism still persists as a ‘socially transmitted disease’.” It is a social malady because it rests on false premises that one racial group of people is inherently superior to the other. It dehumanises people and arrogates power to one group over the other. Racism influences our attitudes and actions to people when we have stereotyped them according to race categories on the basis of their appearance and our perceptions of them (:1). Thus, it determines how we order our relations in society. It is ideological and determined by assumptions of superiority over the other group. It is socially constructed and determined and thus, it is a mask. It is a mask that people invent and wear to hide their

inner fears and insecurities. It is a coping mechanism. Therefore, Oelofsen (2015:135) has argued that the white superiority complex is socially structured in a manner that it relates to black identity, which itself, is specifically created for that purpose. In particular, it exists and functions in terms of a symbolic order of existence and meaning. William Gumede (2016:n.p.) has argued that even though racism was abolished by legislation in South Africa, it still manifests itself in very sophisticated and subtle ways in daily lives and institutions. He asserted that

[r]acism is proscribed in South Africa so day to day racism is now more subtle. The difficulty therefore is that racism, because it is so ingrained, is often unconscious. Just as the police, for example, may put less effort into investigating crimes against ordinary blacks, newsrooms may put fewer resources into covering them. But blacks often also perpetuate racism. Shouting 'racism' to sideline rivals, for self-enrichment at the expense of the public good, or to deflect attention from our own foibles, undermines the fight against racism. (:n.p.)

Gumede (2016) makes crucial points such as that racism is so entrenched in the mind-set of South Africans that sometimes it comes out unwittingly, and that Blacks also perpetuate racism in various subtle practices and attitudes. It lurks behind racial solidarity and "to support often very morally flawed, corrupt and dishonest leaders and undemocratic practices, also undermines the battle against racism" (:n.p.). These practices, according to Gumede, "only reinforces deeply held racial stereotypes of black" and he concludes asserting that "better governance is crucial in slaying the racism dragon" (:n.p.). Thus, Gumede has raised a moral and ethical dimension of racism, namely, negligence in reporting wrongdoing, and sometimes demonising one's rivals as racist in an attempt to silence them for the wrongdoing.

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RACISM IS UNNATURAL AS DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY IS NATURAL

Racism has psychological effects. It is an issue that entails emotions. Swart et al. (2010) conducted a study exploring the effects of interracial, interactive contacts in relation to racial prejudice in South Africa, with specific “attention to the mediational role of intergroup anxiety” (:310). In the study, the psychological dimension of race came to the fore, for example the factor of intergroup anxiety. According to Swart et al., the study demonstrated that close racial interaction by race reduces anxiety. In their argument, they concluded that racial interaction, rather than exclusion, has been associated with “reduced intergroup anxiety, increased affective empathy, positive outgroup attitudes, greater perceived outgroup variability, and reduced negative action tendencies” (:326). They add: “These findings suggest that crossgroup friendships may indeed be important in bringing about improved intergroup relations and intergroup understanding within the South African context, and highlight the central importance of intergroup emotions in the contact–prejudice relationship” (:326).

POST-1994 RACIAL INTEGRATION IN SCHOOLS

Citing Chisholm (2005:215), Meier & Hartell (2009:184) concluded that just as racial separation constituted the characteristic feature of schools in the apartheid era, racial integration became a characteristic feature in the post-apartheid era. Thus, in the 1990s a significant amount of Government-commissioned research focused on the challenges faced in addressing racism and integration in schools. Notably, the *South African School Act* (1996) laid down the principle of restructuring schools in the image of non-racialism and outlawed all forms of discrimination.

Meier and Hartell (2009:181) observed that schools have responded in diverse ways to policies and legislation to desegregate, put in place after 1994. The assimilationist approach, adopted in most

schools, requires learners from previously advantaged backgrounds to adapt to the curriculum, cultures and ethos designed for a different racial group (:181). Therefore, this leaves the status quo intact as the learners merely have to assimilate into a different educational system.

With regard to the 'colour blind' approach, educators claim to see the learner and not the colour but in fact educators gloss over or suppress their racist attitudes, consequently, nothing changes (Meier & Hartell 2009:181). Educators who follow this approach are not willing to change as they believe that to do so would be lowering the standards of the White schools. The contributionist approach, which seeks to change the institutional culture of the school, is not helpful either (:181). Occasional observation of Indian or Zulu cultural days in the yearly calendar of the school pays only token recognition to the cultural contributions of learners from previously disadvantaged schools. It does not transform the institutional race culture of the school (:181). The problem is that the schools do not go beneath the surface to transform the ethos and ideological learnings of the curriculum and open access to equal opportunities. In fact, these efforts fall short of addressing racist attitudes and practices embedded in the age-old traditions, and ethos of schools, some of which are not so obvious.

Zungu (2017:n.p.) expressed the opinion that "[o]ur schools are the breeding ground of racism in South Africa." Zungu went on to note that

[i]t's no longer individuals that are racist per se; it's institutions like schools that perpetuate white supremacy in more surreptitious ways ... [It] has become institutionalised ... children are uniquely exposed and vulnerable to the racial prejudices of friends and teachers. (n.p.)

Zungu's opinions raise the critical issue of the relationship between school space and the power of racism and ideology on the one hand, and on the other how these factors shape the interactions of learners in designated spaces of schools.

SCHOOLS AS SPACES OF SOCIALISATION OF RACISM

Space embodies and configures power. It influences how people relate to it, and vice versa. Doreen Massey (2009) puts it as follows:

The way in which space is conceptualised, in intellectual work, in social life, and in political practice, matters. It has effects, intellectual, social and political ... [It entails] three characteristics: First: that space is the product of relations (including the absence of relations). Space is a complexity of networks, links, exchanges, connections, from the intimate level of our daily lives (think of spatial relations within the home for example) to the global level of financial corporations, for instance, or of counter-hegemonic political activists. (p. 16)

Humans relate to space, as it relates to them. It shapes and moulds them as they shape and mould it. Thus, space entails identity and meaning for people. As Massey (2009) states further:

[S]pace is a «product»: it is produced through the establishment or refusal of relations. It also implies, as a logical consequence, that space is in its very nature «social» (where social is taken to mean «more than individual», rather than simply «human»). (p. 17)

Space configures multiple dimensions of power relationships in social networks. It defines the possibilities and limitations of those networks; it can liberate, as well as constrain relationships. As Massey (2009) puts it:

If there is to be a relation (or, indeed, a non-relation) there needs to be at least more than one thing to do the relating, or not.

This leads to the second proposition about the characteristics of space. This is indeed that space is the dimension of multiplicity. (p. 17)

In this regard, Massey (2009) concludes:

Without space as a dimension it would not be possible for there to be multiplicity (in the sense of the simultaneous coexistence of more than one thing). Equally, and as the mirror image of this, without multiplicity space itself could not exist (space is the product of relations within multiplicity). Space and multiplicity are mutually constitutive. (p. 17)

Space embodies power which configures multiple dimensions of relationships. In turn, these relationships give meaning to space. Hence, interactions in designated spaces shape perceptions and reality. Schools entail special spaces of social interaction. As designated places for imparting knowledge, they are structures where ideological assumptions, ideals and practices of the ruling elite are inculcated. Child racism is one of such issues. It is transmitted through cultural practices of the dominant which may masquerade as ‘discipline’ or as the acceptable conduct or behaviour code of the school. For instance, on 15 July 2019, Mbobo (2019:n.p.) reported that a high school in Pretoria imposed Western hairstyles on African children. The story roused rage from Black parents nationwide. “Parents from other races wondered why Africans were being dramatic about hair, but this serves as an example of policies that were created without considering Africans” (:n.p.). This incident shows that schools constitute critical spaces for the socialisation of children into racism. In this respect, space configured the power to include or exclude, to integrate or segregate.

Racism is an issue of power; the power to assert oneself over the other. As Jerome Joorst (2019) argued:

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Racism is also closely linked to structures of power. Teachers, for example, often hold more power – either directly inscribed in policies or codes or indirectly exercised through education practices – than learners in a classroom setting. The way the teacher uses that power can determine the extent to which a learner, especially one who is of a different race group to the teachers, can speak back to that power ... (n.p.)

In other words, issues of power in the school are intricately interwoven in race relationships. These dimensions of power are deep-seated and sometimes almost silent. Thus, they cannot easily be identified. They lurk behind the traditions, structures and ethos of school life. As Joorst (2019) observed:

Racism, meanwhile, includes beliefs, thoughts and actions based on the idea that one race is innately superior to another. Many of the events that play out in South African schools can be classified as implicit racism. That's because racism in schools very often emanates from broader structural and institutional racism. This is less easy to recognise from the outside than instances of racist language or behaviour. (n.p.)

Zungu (2017) has been highly critical of institutional racism in schools and has noted the subtle manner in which racism plays out in schools. In his view “[i]t is perpetuated almost unknowingly.” Believing that apartheid is over and that racial diversity is a reality, these children are often unable to notice racist attitudes and actions. The system operates in such a way that Black children do not often notice racist practices operating in the system. Black children tend to be treated as subordinates to their White counterparts (Zungu 2017).

In other words, racism operates on the level of consciousness and ideology. These practices run counter to principles of justice and natural order. Wipfler (2019) is of the opinion that

(c)ontrary to popular belief, children have a keen inborn sense of justice. They are built to protest loudly when they or someone else is being treated badly. This sense of justice runs deep ... We don't have to teach children respect for people of other races and abilities. We simply need to preserve their trust in themselves and others, and their inborn sense of justice. (n.p.)

Anderson and Dougé (2019), offered more insights into the processes of learning bias in children by stating that

[t]he process of learning racial bias is a lot like learning a new language ... As early as 6 months, a baby's brain can notice race-based differences. By ages 2 to 4, children can internalize racial bias. By age 12, many children become set in their beliefs – giving parents a decade to mould the learning process, so that it decreases racial bias and improves cultural understanding. But like language immersion, children exposed to society will gain fluency in racial bias even if their parents do nothing. (n.p.)

In other words, racial bias is acquired through a fine process of cultural internalisation and consciousness. Children pick up racial attitudes from their parents and teachers or other adults in society through a complex process of socialisation.

THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN RACIAL SOCIALISATION

In this socialisation process, literature plays a significant role in perpetuating racist perceptions and attitudes in children in South Africa. Klein (1985), for example, noted that

[m]any adults and children believe that books can be racist ... [It is] a book that imprints a racist image on the reader's mind ...

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The racist view is that presented by the dominant (here, white) group of all other groups as being in some way inferior. (p.4)

The standards by which the dominant group measures all others are also themselves determined by the dominant group, and so are inevitably distorted. Racism in books can have many causes, from the unthinking and insensitive passing on of prevailing attitudes, to the conscious strategy of rendering the “‘other’ as ‘lesser’, in order to attack or exploit them...” (Klein 1985:14). These books “instil in children the attitudes and the values of the author which form the ‘residue’ in the child’s mind” (:14). Children become victims of racist ideology.

To some extent, the legacy of apartheid on children’s literature continues to impact South Africa today. For instance, MacCann and Maddy (2001) noted that

South African children’s novels (for ages eight to eighteen) have not portrayed Blacks as ready for equal opportunities. Nor have they shown Africans capable of taking their destiny into their own hands. (p. xiii)

In contrast, “they have typically depicted them as entirely unfit for civic responsibility ...” (MacCann & Maddy 2001:xiii). In their view, therefore, “[c]hildren’s literature is an indicator that points to the tenacity of such calculated racial bias” (:xiii).

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN RACIAL SOCIALIZATION

Davis and Gandy (1999) noted that

[m]edia representations play an important role in informing the ways in which we understand social, cultural, ethnic, and racial

differences. Racial identity may play an especially powerful role in shaping our responses to mass media. (p. 36)

For instance, Hewitt (2018:n.p.), speaking from an American context, asserts that, “*Black Panther*, besides living up to the hype of its potential success, it also counters many popular depictions of what it means to be Black and African.” As a movie, with all its positive elements, as well as its limitations, it opens opportunities for parents and caregivers to talk with their children about race. The film brings about “important dynamics of what it means to be African versus African American to the strength and determination of Black women” (:n.p.).

In South Africa, the role of the media in socialising children into racism has come under scrutiny by the government. In August 2000, the South African Human Rights Commission produced a report entitled ‘Faultlines: An Inquiry into Racism in the Media: South African government’. The report expressed the view that in South Africa, child racism is historically deeply rooted in the national psyche of the nation. In particular, it highlighted the deep hegemonic character of racism. A part of the report (South African Human Rights Commission 2000) declared that

(t)he historic ideology of a meritocracy based on race is passed down through the generations at the level of truism. It is not questioned at the time it is conveyed – by society to child – because the information is offered uncontroversially. It is also justified by what the child sees in the world of reality. Any later questioning of truism is difficult when it has been accepted in early childhood when values are formed. (p. 58)

In other words, society has so much ‘naturalised’ racism that it has been easily accepted as a way of life that cannot be changed. It operates on the level of the taken-for-granted and all races have accepted more or less the status quo. The South African Human Rights Commission Report (2000) went on to state that

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[m]ost importantly, racist ideology is absorbed in the same way by both races. The national culture is essentially the culture of the dominant 'race', but because it is national everyone within that culture absorbs it. In South Africa Black children are given the same essential messages as White children – to the effect that White people are superior to Black people. Like White children they receive the information as fact. It is justified by everything they see around them in terms of successful access to resources and opportunities and worldly achievement. (p. 58)

Racism as a social construct, so entrenched in the attitudes, habits and life-style, is re-enforced by systems and structures which allow and deny access to resources in society on racial grounds. In other words, perceptions and attitudes of racism are buttressed by material conditions on the ground. The report (South African Human Rights Commission 2000:58) continued to assert that accommodation to the ideology by both sides is the fundamental challenge facing the society. This report further stated

[t]his is a defining characteristic of racism: both sides believe the ideology to some degree. This is different from mutually hostile groups who are roughly equal in strength: neither of them internalises the stigmatising stereotypes of the 'other'. (p. 58)

The report shows the extent to which the media plays a critical role in entrenching racist tendencies in children in South Africa. However, the media is merely one important pillar of society that inculcates racist attitudes and lifestyle. The role of parents or adults in influencing children is equally critical.

In 2018, *Eye-Witness News* reported that the Retail giant shop H & M was compelled to apologise for using a Black child to promote a sweatshirt with the slogan "coolest monkey in the jungle". The company withdrew the ad from its "website after hundreds of social media users accused it of being racist. However, it continues to sell the

hooded top online” (:n.p.). The use of the ad with this slogan, raises the ethical issue as to the image of the boy used.

In 2006, the *Media Monitoring Project* (MMP), conducted a research project to determine how media represented children, the Empowering Children & Media project (ECM) 29. The study dealt with various topics that affected children, one of which was race. The MMP’s (Mtwana & Bird 2006:17) study found that racial issues affecting children “were not generally discussed in the media unless it was in a report dealing specifically with a racial/racist incident.” Such reporting, however, did not give a background and an in-depth analysis to the issues “around human rights and discrimination.” One example related to two Black children who were told by a White farmer to paint themselves with white paint. This incident was not reported as racist even though it had a strong racial dimension to it.

As a comparative case, the MMP (Mtwana & Bird 2006) cited an incident that involved the coverage of the Happy Sindane case, the 16 year old from Bronkhorstpruit. The media reported that “he was in search of his ‘White’ parents claiming that he was kidnapped by a ‘Black’ domestic worker and she brought him to the township as her child” (:17). While the media clearly identified the incident as racial, “it had little analysis of the racial issues at stake” (:17). There are two issues here regarding journalism. It is possible that the reporters lacked the skills of journalism, or there was a deliberate negligence, or oversight on reporting on such crucial issues. This kind of reporting gives the impression that the issues were not very important. However, more importantly, in either case, it would seem to suggest that the media was complicit in ignoring the issues of human rights and justice that underlay the racial incidents. It would seem to me that the under-reporting may also have some ethical implications with regard to the manner of reporting of these incidents.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN RACIAL SOCIALISATION

The role of parents in racial socialisation plays a critical role in moulding racial identity in children. Lee (2019:n.p.) observed that grade-schoolers are impressionable from a very early age. They are at a stage when they can form opinions about themselves, as well as of others around them. “This is when their natural curiosity about differences in appearance and cultural backgrounds really begin to come into play.” (:n.p.). Lee further states that:

[m]ost are born with a natural sense of justice and fairness. Unless they are taught to be hurtful and cruel, children know that it’s wrong to attack others either physically or with words. All we have to do is nurture this natural love of people and get out of their way. (:n.p.)

Similarly, as Kang (2017) observed,

[c]hildren form biases early, and can quickly pick up cues from adults as well as peers ... Kids may be exposed to prejudiced attitudes at home, as well as at school. These learned biases can have a significant impact on how they perceive and treat others. (:n.p.)

From the American context, Wipfler (2019) stated how a child relates and responds to racist situations and contexts. She pronounced that

[w]hen any child witnesses racism, it frightens [him and her]. The racism fastens onto fears that have cracked a child’s confidence in himself and others, like a secondary infection invades an open wound. [He/she] doesn’t feel good enough or strong enough to reject racist mistreatment and protest it. So

the words, tones, and attitudes are imprinted in his mind, along with a fresh helping of fear. (:n.p.)

If he is a black child, according to Wipfler (2019),

[h]is fears have propped the door open for the racist tones, words, and stereotypes to enter his mind and become part of how he thinks about himself and his people. When he feels upset, separate, afraid, or angry, he will believe the racist content. (:n.p.)

A black child “who is feeling upset may also act out the oppressor role of racism, targeting either himself or other children of color” (Wipfler 2019:n.p.). About white children, Wipfler stated:

[a] white child’s fears also make [him or her] vulnerable to adopting racist tones, words, and stereotypes. When a white child feels separate, scared, or disconnected, he tries to escape these feelings by playing out the oppressor role he has been frightened by. The intensity of his actions will reflect the depth of the fears that the child carried before the racism he witnessed gave those fears a racial twist. (:n.p.)

In a report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016) it is pointed out that

[c]hild outcomes are interconnected within and across diverse domains of development. They result from and are enhanced by early positive and supportive interactions with parents and other caregivers. These early interactions can have a long-lasting ripple effect on development across the life course. (:46)

Wipfler (2019:n.p.) makes a similar point by stating that the parents’ influence in winning trust can be critical to the life-long development of a wholesome character in a child. In her view, it is

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crucial that parents endeavour to develop a very close relationship with the child; showing the child lots of affection and set ‘sensible limits’ for the child. Grown-ups who do not attack the child, will make the child feel at home and relaxed with others. In this kind of environment, the child grows up to trust people (:n.p.).

Wipfler’s argument is crucial. Sooner or later, the child will start projecting in the wider community attitudes and habits picked up in the family. Socialisation of a child on this level will have long-term consequences for the wider society. According to McAdoo (1999:7), studies done in the USA concluded that it was more difficult to raise children to have pride in their group identity in an environment where their group was perceived negatively by the wider community. McAdoo (:7) further noted that the “difference may exist between a child’s self-concept and his or her ethnic or racial identity. These are two distinct variables, and they are often at odds with each other.”

On the other hand, according to Pachter et al. (2010:n.p.), “[r]acism can be conceptualised as a toxic stressor that may affect health and well-being.” McCarthy (2019) noted that racism can be seen as a disease.

Racism and its effects can lead to chronic stress for children. And chronic stress leads to actual changes in hormones that cause inflammation in the body, a marker of chronic disease. Stress that a mother experiences during pregnancy can affect children even before they are born. (p. 1)

POSITIVE PARENTING: PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Racial socialisation can also have positive dimensions. Klein (1985:23) gave an example of parents’ positive influence on children’s ability to confront racial bias. She refers to the seven-year-old Maria who was able to point to racism and sexism in a book. Burt, Kit Lei and

Simons (2017:418) declared that “[s]cholarship suggests that racial socialization practices may promote resilience to racial discrimination in part by fostering positive racial identities.” They argue that

[a]mong Black Americans, racial identity is defined as “the significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to being Black in their conceptualizations of self”... (p. 419)

For parents to achieve this, Anderson and Douge (2019:n.p.) suggest that they must first come to terms with their own racial attitudes before they can correct attitudes of racial and ethnic intolerance in children. Lee (2019:n.p.) expresses the same view stating that “[p]arents must first face up to their racial prejudices before they deal with racial messages they impart on their children.” To be a role model for their children, parents must first deal with their racially influenced thoughts, feelings and actions. Lee (:n.p.) opined that to foster a “culture of inclusiveness, we must face up to and acknowledge our own racial biases, so that we can deal with those that are unfair or cause harm to others.” Anderson and Douge (2019) went further saying that “[i]f you want your children to believe what you preach, you have to exhibit those behaviors as well”, and they added to this that

[c]hildren learn racial bias through everyday comments and actions from adults. It entails the process of socialisation; that take place on deeper levels, of thinking, internalization of thoughts, which influence perceptions. Your everyday comments and actions will say more than anything else. Have a wide, culturally diverse social network. Encourage your children to have diverse circles of friends, as well. This lends itself to engagement in multicultural activities and experiences. (:n.p.)

But parents should also call out racism and discuss it with their children (Russell 2017:n.p.). Lee (2019:n.p.) emphasised that “[t]alking about different cultures and customs and races and answering any questions they have taught your child that it’s okay to

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notice differences, and more importantly, it teaches him that it's good to talk about them." It is much better to discuss children's questions about physical and cultural differences, than ignoring it and not helping them to understand and accept these differences.

Lee (2019:n.p.) also made the point that understanding the feelings and behaviour of people in other communities can not only open possibilities for healing after a tragedy has occurred but can also prevent future ones. In conclusion, Kang (2017:n.p.) stated that by learning to deal with the situation with forthrightness, and frankly sharing with friends, 'authority figures' will make children feel empowered, and positive to deal with negative situations.

CONCLUSION

This chapter started by defining and highlighting racism as a societal problem. Specifically, it argued that racism is a social construct, conditioned by societal attitudes and lifestyles. It demonstrated that racism is unnatural, as it runs counter to natural principles of human equality. It also argued that racist attitudes in children derive from the processes of socialisation in society in four areas: the school, literature, the media and the home. It was emphasised that schools and the educational system play a most critical role in socialising children in racist attitudes and practices. The critical role that parents play in fostering racist attitudes and habits in children was discussed and some perspectives on positive parenting were stressed.

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